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Students host public forum to discuss professor's comments

Brandon Hayes
News Editor

Photo: Nathyn Gibson

Students and professors listen to the comments Associate Professor Maurice Eisenstein allegedly made during his lectures during the open forum held Thursday night.

More than 100 people attended a public forum to debate topics of diversity, inclusivity and intimidation in the classroom regarding the allegedly harassing comments made by PUC Associate Professor Maurice Eisenstein.

The Nov. 17 forum was hosted by protesters and various student organizations who accuse Eisenstein of teaching hatred in his political science class lectures and making offensive comments towards women, as well as Muslims, African Americans, Hispanics and other religions and ethnicities.

People came and went, but throughout the two hour discussion, nearly every seat in the lecture hall of Gyte 103 was filled by students, staff and faculty members. Organizers said they invited Eisenstein to the forum, but he did not make an appearance.

During the week of Nov. 14, demonstrators halted protests, focusing a larger effort on collecting signatures for a petition that calls for PUC administration to launch an investigation into the conduct of Eisenstein. As of Nov. 18, the petition had approximately 615 signatures.

Jonathan Wilson, vice president of the PUC Social Justice Club, Jessica Tabor, forum moderator, both stressed to the audience that student demonstrators are not against the freedom of speech, the opinions and views of professors, the idea of tenure of professors or the Jewish religion, but that they are fighting against hatred, racism and sexism.

After a brief introduction by protesters explaining the reasoning behind the forum, two audio recordings were played via YouTube, both of which were allegedly from Eisenstein's Jewish Studies course from spring 2011.

On the recording, a person believed to be Eisenstein could be heard stating, "blacks had an easy time with the 1960's" and on the second, "if Muslims never existed, it really would not make a whole lot of difference. Except for raping four-year-olds, they haven't done anything," At one point, Eisenstein allegedly went as far as asking his class if they would care if there were no Muslims.

A general feeling of shock and disgust could be felt as people muttered underneath their breath and gasped at the comments allegedly made by Eisenstein.

Perhaps the most moving comments of the evening were made by Associate Professor of History and Political Science, Kathleen Tobin, as she relayed her complaints about Eisenstein to the students.

Tobin said she has been dealing with similar incidents for nearly 20 years, and that many students, who were afraid to speak out, have filed complaints with her and other professors. She said students should expect to come to a classroom and have their professors teach the truth and not have to defend themselves continually.

"It's emotional to listen to that [audio recording] even though I already listened to it on YouTube. Walking in here and seeing so many people, it was emotional to know that you all have banded together in solidarity. People who go against the grain are isolated; there's an absolute hostile work environment there. I was told by other faculty to just laugh it off, but I've been dealing with this for almost 20 years. It's hard to speak up any longer and you (the students) have empowered me to do that tonight," Tobin said.

Another discussion was brought up highlighting the acceptable behavior for professors in and outside of the classroom; whether students should pay to listen to a professor who teaches opinion as opposed to teaching facts.

"He's supposed to be teaching American political thought, yet he dismisses the civil rights movement as a bunch of cold showers. It's the biggest episode in American political thought to this day. His comments are simply unbecoming as a professor and it violates [the] ethics codes of the university," said student Ashwin Adhikari.

PUC Graduate Jose Gutierrez said students should appreciate the fact that Eisenstein makes people think about what he says and the fact that he opens up different political views. He also told students that if they feel so strongly about these issues, then they need to back up their arguments. Gutierrez said, "There's a logical way to go about this. Are you guys going to sit around and keep complaining, or are you guys going to stand up and actually do something about it?"

"I stood up and spent the whole hour and 20 minutes talking about Latinos to the class," Gutierrez said.

The audience become engulfed in argument after Erica Rozenich, who is currently taking a class with Eisenstein, said with the political tone in America being very harsh, she appreciates having a professor who will challenge her thoughts during class lectures and make her fight for what she believes in.

"When I go to his class, that's exactly what I want, I'm getting the experience that I want; [to] go home and think about what was said and come back the next class and debate," Rozenich said.

PUC Student Nikko Elliott, responded to Rozenich by stating, "If you think the only way you can be challenged to learn is by racist, bigoted comments, then we should all be going to school at the Westborough Baptist Church."

Philosophy major Charlie Gaspadarek, asked the crowd what action they would like to see taken, and he questioned what the students are prepared to do collectively to make that change.

"There's a half a million dollars worth of tuition sitting in this room. I'm very strong in my conviction. I will drop out and take six months off from school to show that I don't want this in my school," Gaspadarek stated.

Steven Brumfield, PUC student and former military veteran, cited a personal confrontation he had with Eisenstein on the 10-year-anniversary of September 11. Brumfield said even though Eisenstein gave a moving speech of the events and had heartfelt thoughts about it, the event spiraled out of control when Eisenstein allegedly commented that America has began to forget about the terrorist attacks, because more needs be done. Brumfield said Eisenstein allegedly said, "In the case of 9/11, I think

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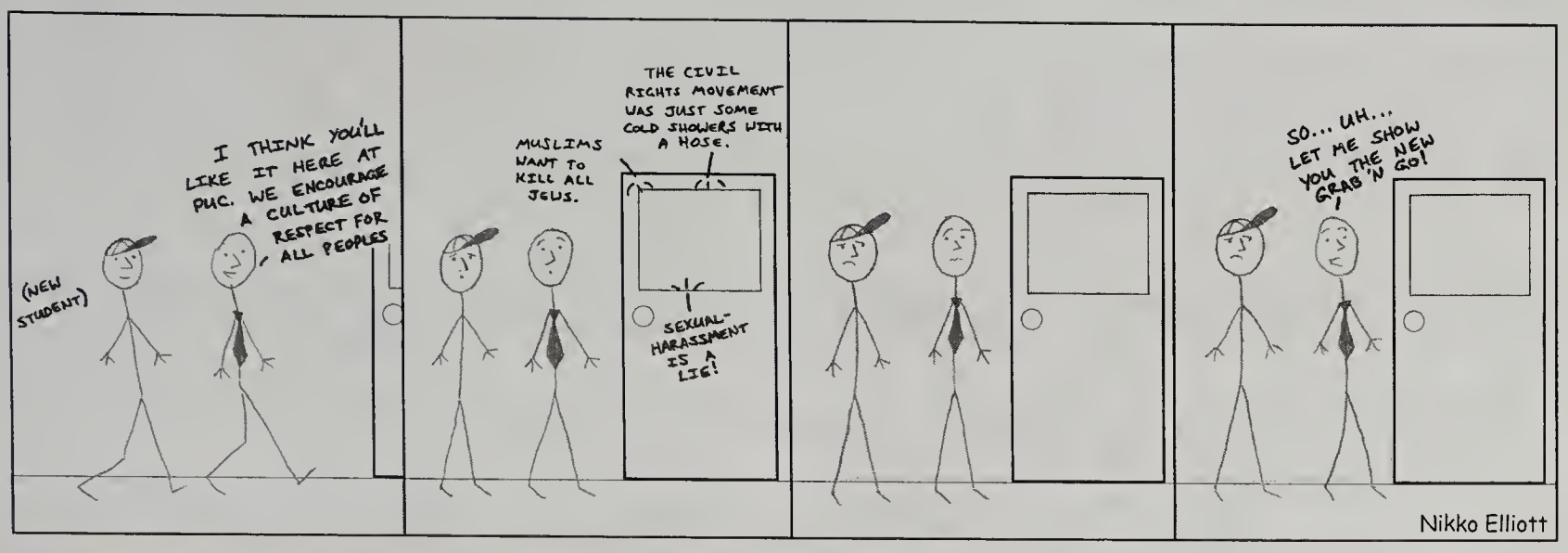
To view pictures from student protests and of the forum, visit www.pucchronicle.com
To watch video from the public forum, visit: http://www.youtube.com/user/nathyndg#p/u/6/3rPvYVb7efM


(NEW STUDENT)
I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT HERE AT PUC. WE ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF RESPECT FOR ALL PEOPLES
MUSLIMS WANT TO KILL ALL JEWS.
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WAS JUST SOME COLD SHOWERS WITH A HOSE.
SEXUAL-HARASSMENT IS A LIE!
SO... UH... LET ME SHOW YOU THE NEW GRAB 'N GO!
Nikko Elliott

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COMMENTS?

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"After listening to the audio of his lectures, it sounds like he's trying to instigate students. The problem is when the university wants to condone this guy's viewpoint."

-PUC Student Roger Jestes

"I can appreciate the fact that he opens up different views for us." "I think some of the things that he says are so comical that we can laugh it off half the time, [but] the other half it makes us so mad that we want to say something about it." "We can appreciate the fact that he makes you think about what he says."

-PUC graduate Jose Gutierrez

Comments from the public forum

"Students should be able to expect to come to a classroom and have their professors teach the truth. We know that there are many versions of history, but we base it on evidence. Students shouldn't have to go and defend themselves continually. That should not be the norm."

-Associate Professor of History and Political Science Kathleen Tobin

"I think there's something in our academic transcripts that says we as students are not allowed to use curse words in papers that you give to your professors or incite racism. There are guidelines that you, as students, must follow. Now why can't our role models follow those same examples?"

-PUC Student Natasha Lentner, psychology major

"Freedom of speech, freedom of speech... The second a person decides to take that freedom and use it as a weapon, they no longer have responsibility to exercise that freedom. When you go into any institution, for a career or anything, make sure that you have your values down straight. This is a perfect example of systems and institutions not being able to effectively police themselves by allowing this to continue on a college campus."

–PUC Student Kyle Young

Forum

continued from page 1

Photo: Nathyn Gibson

Joann Holmen talks about her experiences in Associate Professor Maurice Eisenstein's class during the open forum held Thursday night in Gyte 103.

Photo: Nathyn Gibson

Associate Professor of History and Political Science Kathleen Tobin speaks of problems with Associate Professor Maurice Eisenstein that have been taking place before some of the professors were born.

we have forgotten it because we haven't done enough; all Muslims should be annihilated."

Brumfield asked, "What do you mean we haven't done enough? What defense can a person have to use the word annihilate?"

At the closing of the forum, Student Government Association President Jessie Martin said the student government will continue to remain neutral on the issue, but would remain supportive of the voice of the student body. Martin said for students to take the right steps in filing formal complaints and to voice their concerns to PUC administration.

"We as the student government, based on what we've seen tonight [and] based on the continued complaints, will call on the administration to launch an investigation. Whether he is guilty or not, we support the student body's voice," Martin said.

Following the forum, a student demonstrator said one of the tires on her car was slashed. While the direct cause of this incident is undetermined, the protesters have said they will remain on the lookout for future threats.

Wala Issa, a PUC student who alleges Eisenstein called her a "Jew hater," during a public discussion on Facebook, met with PUC Chancellor Thomas Keon on Nov. 15, to file a personal complaint against Eisenstein. Issa, along with a group of student supporters of anti-racism, said they expect a response from university officials in the near future.

According to organizers of the forum, another debate will be held tentatively after Thanksgiving break, but no date or time has been set at the time of publication.

Photo: Nathyn Gibson

Steven Brumfield, military veteran and PUC student, explains a personal conflict regarding comments Associate Professor Maurice Eisenstein made during a 9/11 memorial service.

Photo: Nathyn Gibson

Barry Lyons, a psychology major, reacts to the comments presented to the audience made by Associate Professor Maurice Eisenstein in his previous lectures.

'Dreamland Burning' hits home

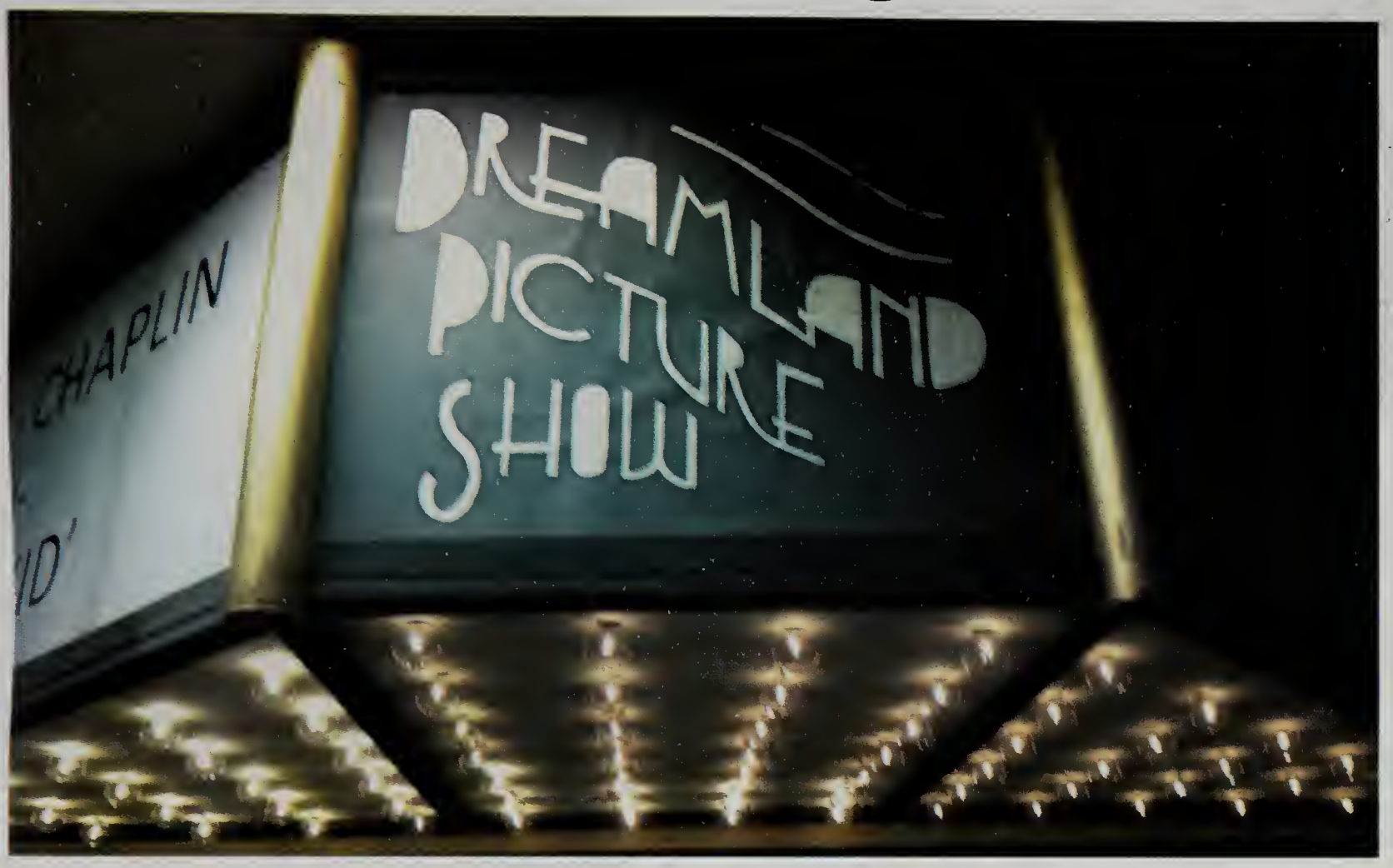

Photo: Brandon Hayes

The marquee above the entrance to YJean Chambers Hall simulates an old-time theater feel.

Jessica Gerlich
Entertainment Editor

Resounding repetition of "never again" booms through YJean Chambers Hall as the world premiere of "Dreamland Burning," directed by Corya Channing, plays on. The music of the play, written by Academy Award nominated Tevin Thomas, hangs in the air as a somber reminder of the events of the Tulsa race war. The story of "Dreamland Burning," written by John Lisbon Wood, carries a huge emotional weight on its shoulders, and the Purdue Theater Company brings that burden to the audience with ease.

"Dreamland Burning" tells the story of the Tulsa race war of 1921, a time in history that has almost been forgotten by many. Black and white people were segregated in Tulsa, Okla., but there was a "mutual economic interdependence" between the two groups. In other words, the black people were relentlessly working for the white people, and as long as no one stepped over the line, there was no problem. The eminent racism is obvious from the beginning of the show. Tensions build as the story moves on, and the entire black community of Greenwood goes up in flames.

The walkway outside of YJean Chambers Hall is set up like a storefront, which sets the mood from the time patrons buy their tickets. Music of the1920s is played in the background as people are seated. The blacks of Greenwood and whites of Tulsa are on separate sides of the stage for the duration of the show, which heightens the uncomfortable feelings brought forth throughout the production.

Much of the play is written in rhyme, which works sometimes and other times comes off as somewhat cheesy. The rhyming sometimes gives a feeling of silliness to a gut-wrenchingly real play. It does not take away from the experience, however, because this play still makes its point very clear: that racism is absolutely wrong and that the story of Tulsa needs to be out in the open.

Thomas and Wood worked on the script and music simultaneously. Thomas said that he grew up in Tulsa and was inspired to write the screenplay from stories he had heard from neighbors. He later gave John the screenplay and the two collaborated. The script had to be cut for PUC's production.

"Most characters in the play actually existed. Mr. Smitherman was one of them," Wood said.

Wood actually performs in this production of "Dreamland Burning" because of some scheduling conflicts with other cast members.

Thomas' music adds an immense dimension to the script. Three of five songs are performed a capella, and the bone-chilling and beautiful sound is enough to make the audiences' jaws drop. A.J. Smitherman (Vincent Banks) and Alice's (Amber Rosser) performance of "Gonna Build Me a Rock" at the beginning of the show sets the tone for all that is to come.

"Everyone did a fantastic job," Wood said after the show.

Choreographer Cheryl Barnes also played a Greenwood seamstress. At one point during the song "Let Loose" about the blacks' one day a week off work, Barnes does a dance that puts a smile on every patron's face.

Elly Eveland plays Sarah Page, a young, beautiful white elevator operator. Her part provides an integral part of the story, and though her words and gestures can be somewhat comical, they show difference between the way people thought during the time of the Tulsa race war and the way people think now.

At one particularly wrenching part of the story, Harriet (Kelly Horton), is asking Smitherman (Vincent Banks) how to teach black history to her young daughter, Eldora (Anna Hayes). "How do I tell her there are people that just assume she's worthless? How do I tell her life is so different for those with crinkly hair?" Harriet asks with tears in her eyes. These words put the entire message of the play into perspective.

Roy Hamilton puts in a heart-wrenching performance as an old man who works at a lumber yard. Though his part is relatively small, Hamilton makes the audience emphasize with what he is feeling. He painfully sings "Take Me Home," which brings chills to the spine and tears to the eyes. This moment makes the entire show.

The only real issues with the play are minor sound and lighting problems. Since there are so many people onstage at a time, sometimes characters with one-liners are not under any light. The sound effects are fitting, but suffer from the problem sound effects always have: timing. They seem somewhat out of place at times. This does not take away from the show much though, because of the strong cast and writing.

Anyone who can find the time should attend "Dreamland Burning." This show brings up issues that people need to be aware of, and it tells a story that not many have heard. Racism still exists, and people are still being hurt because of it. Wood's "Dreamland Burning" is a reminder of a truth best described by the last line of the play.

"We are all brothers and sisters if you just look beneath the color of our skin. Never again. Never again. Never again."

'Dreamland Burning'

"Dreamland Burning" is playing in YJean Chambers Hall on Sat., Nov. 26 at 7 p.m. and Sun., Nov. 27 at 3 p.m., as well as Fri., Dec. 2 at 7 p.m. Tickets are $12 for adults and $10 for seniors. PUC students with ID and children ages 7-12 get in for $5.